

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6899

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION USNATO

DIA WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VALLETTA 0842

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MT

SUBJ: NATIONALIST PARTY FOREIGN POLICY PROGRAM

REF: (A) VALLETTA 0141 (ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENT 1976) - NOTAL;

(B) VALLETTA 0794 (DTG 071425Z JUL 76)

1. SUMMARY. THE DEPUTY LEADER OF THE MALTESE NATIONALIST PARTY, VINCENT TABONE, (WHO SHARES RESPONSIBILITY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WITH OPPOSITION LEADER GIORGIO BORG OLIVIER), DISCUSSED HIS PARTY'S FOREIGN POLICY PLANS AND ASPIRATIONS WITH THE AMBASSADOR ON JULY 19. TABONE HAD CALLED, AT OUR REQUEST, FOR A GENERAL REVIEW OF THIS SUBJECT PRIOR TO THE AMBASSADOR'S DEPARTURE FOR WASHINGTON. THE DISCUSSION DID NOT PRODUCE ANY SURPRISES, BUT IT DID PROVIDE A VERY GOOD INDICATION OF WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A NEW NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT, SHOULD THEY WIN THE FORTHCOMING MALTESE ELECTIONS. TABONE WAS MOST APPRECIATIVE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK AGAIN WITH THE AMBASSADOR ON THIS SUBJECT, AND HE MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT THE NATIONALISTS WOULD SEEK CLOSE COOPERATION

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WITH THE USG IF THEY ARE RETURNED TO POWER. THE COST

WILL BE HIGH, HOWEVER. END SUMMARY.

2. TABONE BEGAN BY STATING THAT THE VIEWS OF HIS PARTY CONCERNING MALTA'S FUTURE, AND THE NATURE OF THE GOM'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE POST-1979 PERIOD, HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN DISCUSSED WITH MANY OF MALTA'S REAL "FRIENDS", I.E. THE COUNTRIES OF WESTERN EUROPE MOST CLOSELY INTERESTED IN MALTA SUCH AS WEST GERMANY, FRANCE, ITALY AND THE UNITED KINGDOM. THESE NATIONS ARE MALTA'S TRADITIONAL AND NATURAL ALLIES IN MANY FIELDS (SECURITY, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, ETC), AND A NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WOULD ONCE AGAIN SEEK CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE WESTERN WORLD, IN CONTRAST TO MINTOFF'S THIRD WORLD POSTURING DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS. TABONE ADDED THAT HE PERSONALLY HAD ALSO DISCUSSED THESE MATTERS WITH SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS AT NATO HEADQUARTERS TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER THE NATIONALIST PLAN WOULD BE "PRACTICAL" FROM A NATO STANDPOINT. FINALLY, TABONE EMPHASIZED THAT IT WAS MOST OBVIOUS THAT THE ONE GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD HAVE THE KEY ROLE TO PLAY IN MALTA'S FUTURE WAS OF COURSE THE UNITED STATES, AS THE GUARANTOR OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA.

3. TO SIMPLIFY, TABONE STATED THAT A NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WOULD SEEK, IN THE POST-1979 PERIOD (AFTER THE BRITISH MILITARY WITHDRAWAL) AN INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY FOR MALTA WHICH WOULD BE GUARANTEED BY ONE OR MORE WESTERN EUROPEAN NATIONS, AND BY THE UNITED STATES, ON A "RECIPROCAL BASIS". WHAT THE NATIONALISTS HAVE IN MIND IS A GROUP OF INDIVIDUAL BILATERAL AGREEMENTS WITH SEVERAL WESTERN COUNTRIES PATTERNED ON THE U.S. DEFENSE AGREEMENT WITH ICELAND PURSUANT TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY. THE NATIONALISTS WOULD NOT SEEK NATO MEMBERSHIP OR SPECIFIC NATO SPONSORSHIP OF SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT, BUT THEY WOULD HOPE FOR NATO APPROVAL AND ENCOURAGEMENT. (TABONE STATED LUNS HAD INDICATED INTEREST IN THIS APPROACH, AND HAS PROMISED TO DISCUSS IT IN WASHINGTON ON ONE OF HIS CONSULTATIVE TRIPS THERE.)

4. IN EXCHANGE FOR THE SECURITY GUARANTEE WHICH MALTA WOULD REALIZE FROM SUCH A GROUP OF BILATERAL DEFENSE

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AGREEMENTS, A FUTURE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WOULD BE WILLING TO MAINTAIN AND MAN (WITH MALTESE PERSONNEL) SUCH DEFENSE FACILITIES AS NATO AND/OR THE GUARANTOR GOVERNMENTS DESIRED, WHICH COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO THEM IN CASE OF NEED. TABONE SAID THAT WHILE A NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT OBJECT TO A MINIMUM NUMBER OF SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL FROM THE OTHER GOVERNMENTS BEING RESIDENT IN MALTA, THEY WOULD INSIST ON THE ARRANGEMENT

BEING ALMOST COMPLETELY A "MALTESE SHOW" EXCEPT IN TIME OF CRISIS. UNLIKE THE PRESENT MILITARY FACILITIES AGREEMENT WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM, TABONE DOES NOT ENVISAGE A LARGE RESIDENT FOREIGN MILITARY FORCE AFTER 1979, AS THIS WOULD ONLY REPRESENT A RETURN TO THE OLD "FORTRESS IMAGE" FOR MALTA, WHICH THE NATIONALISTS ARE JUST AS ANXIOUS TO END AS ARE MINTOFF AND THE LABOR PARTY.

5. HOWEVER, TABONE WAS MOST EMPHATIC IN STATING THAT A NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WOULD WELCOME, AND INDEED SEEK, A RESTORATION OF FREQUENT NATO MILITARY ACCESS TO MALTA, INCLUDING SIXTH FLEET VISITS (AS OPPOSED TO A LARGE RESIDENT MILITARY PRESENCE). ALSO, THE MALTESE WOULD WELCOME TECHNICAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR MALTESE PERSONNEL UNDER THESE ARRANGEMENTS.

6. THE MAJOR HURDLE IN SUCH A SCHEME, AS TABONE ACKNOWLEDGED, WILL BE THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT WHICH MALTA MUST ASK IN EXCHANGE FROM THE GUARANTOR POWERS FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS AFTER 1979. TABONE SAID THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT MALTA CANNOT SURVIVE ECONOMICALLY IN THE SHORT TERM WITHOUT A CONTINUANCE OF THE DOLS 80 MILLION "PLUS" ANNUAL SUBSIDY NOW REALIZED FROM NATO BASE RENTAL PAYMENTS AND LOCAL BRITISH EXPENDITURES. ALTHOUGH A NEW NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO REDUCE, AND HOPEFULLY ELIMINATE, THIS DEPENDENCE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THROUH THE DIVERSIFICATION AND EXPANSION OF THE MALTESE ECONOMY, THIS COULD NOT REALISTICALLY BE EXPECTED FOR "PERHAPS FIVE YEARS" AFTER THE BRITISH DEPART.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6900

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AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMASSY TRIPOLI
USNATO 272
DIA
USDOCOSOUTH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VALLETTA 0842

7. TABONE SAID THAT AFTER THE MALTESE ELECTIONS (WHICH HE THOUGHT WOULD OCCUR IN MID-SEPTEMBER), A NEW NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE THE SUBJECT OF MALTA'S SECURITY AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY AFTER 1979 THE FIRST ORDER OF PRIORITY, AND WOULD WISH TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT OFFICIALLY WITH THE USG AND INTERESTED WEST EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS JUST AS SOON AS APPROPRIATE. THE NATIONALISTS, OF COURSE, WERE IN NO POSITION TO ASK ANY GOVERNMENT TO MAKE ANY COMMITMENTS AT THIS TIME, AS THEY DID NOT REPRESENT MALT. HOWEVER, THEY DID HOPE THE USG WOULD UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THEIR DESIRES AND PLANS, AND WOULD GIVE THE MALTESE A FAIR AND FRIENDLY HEARING WHEN THE TIME CAME.

8. ON OTHER SUBJECTS, TABONE SAID THAT THE NATIONALISTS THINK THEY WILL WIN THE COMING ELECTION, BUT THAT IT WILL BE A CLOSE ONE, WITH PERHAPS AS LITTLE AS A ONE-SEAT MARGIN BETWEEN PARTIES. HE ADMITTED THAT SO MANY INTANGIBLES MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO PREDICT THE OUTCOME BUT, ON BALANCE, HE THOUGHT THE TIDE WAS RUNNING IN THE NATIONALISTS' FAVOR, AND THAT THEY WOULD BEAT THE LABORITES AT THE POLLS BY A CONFIDENTIAL

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VERY SMALL MARGIN.

9. CONCERNING MINTOFF'S HEAVY-HANDED COURTING OF QADHAFI, TABONE SAID THIS DID NOT EXCESSIVELY CONCERN THE NATIONALISTS. THEIR POLICY WOULD BE TO MAINTAIN FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH ALL ARAB STATES, INCLUDING LIBYA, BUT THEY WOULD BACK AWAY FROM MINTOFF'S MORE EXTREME ANTICS WHERE QADHAFI IS CONCERNED. HE DID NOT THINK THERE WOULD BE UNDUE LIBYAN INFLUENCE IN FUTURE MALTESE AFFAIRS, AND STATED THAT QADHAFI AND OTHER LIBYAN LEADERS HAD MADE IT CLEAR THEY

WOULD NOT CREATE ANY PROBLEMS FOR A NEW NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT. TABONE EVEN THOUGHT THAT HIS PARTY COULD WORK OUT SOME FORM OF JOINT OIL EXPLORATION AGREEMENT WITH THE LIBYANS, AN AREA IN WHICH MINTOFF HAS COMPLETELY FAILED.

10. COMMENT: TABONE'S PRESENTATION WAS AS EXPECTED (SEE REFTELS), SINCE MANY OF THESE IDEAS HAVE BEEN MENTIONED

FREQUENTLY IN THE PRESS AND AT POLITICAL MEETINGS DURING RECENT MONTHS. PERHAPS THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECT WAS TABONE'S CLEAR INDICATION THAT A FUTURE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT WILL LOOK TO THE USG, WITHOUT QUALIFICATION, TO TAKE THE LEAD IN NEGOTIATING MALTA'S PLACE IN THE MEDITERRNEAN AFTER 1979. A ROLE FOR THE BRITISH IN THIS SCENARIO WAS HARDLY MENTIONED AT ALL,PERHAPS BECAUSE (AT LONG LAST) THEY HAVE FINALLY ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT THE BRITISH ARE LEAVING MALTA. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT, SHOULD THE NATIONALISTS WIN, THERE WILL BE A GOM DELEGATION IN WASHINGTON VERY SOON THEREAFTER. AND WHILE THE NATIINALISTS ARE OUR FRIENDS AND MEAN WELL, THE PRICE TAG WILL BE VERY HIGH, AND PERHAPS FAR TOO RICH FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL DIGESTION. UNFORTUATELY, THE NATIONALISTS (LIKE ALL MALTESE) THINK THE WORLD REVOLVES AROUND THIS LITTLE GROUP OF ISLANDS, AND THAT SOMEBODY, THEREFORE, MUST CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THEM IN THE STYLE TO WHICH THEY HAVE LONG SINCE BECOME ACCUSTOMED. THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS SMALL PIECE OF REAL ESTATE MAY NOT BE WORTH AS MUCH TO THE WEST IN 1979 AS IT WAS IN 1971 JUST HASN'T OCCURRED TO THEM. BUT AT LEAST THE NATIONALISTS AREN'S THREATENING TO RUSH INTO THE ARMS OF STRANGE BEDFELLOWS LIKE QADHAFI
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IF WE ARE NOT ABLE TO MEET ALL OF THEIR EXPECTATIONS. THEY SEE MALTA'S FUTURE AS PART OF THE WESTERN WORLD, NOT IN A STRANGE ALLIANCE WITH ONE OR MORE OF MINTOFF'S PECULIAR "FRIENDS". SMITH

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